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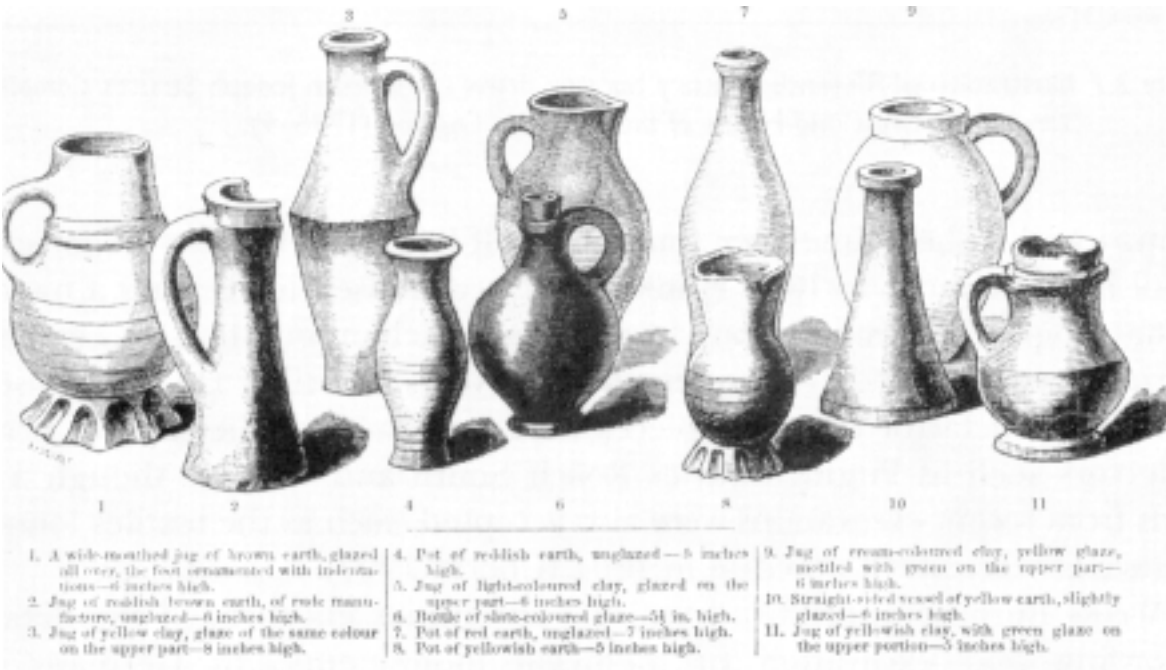
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Medieval pottery production in England: a new gazetteer

Phil Marter and Chris Gerrard



In the medieval period, pottery production was a significant part of the economy. The database lists no medieval pottery production centres prior to 1850, but by the end of the century fifteen had been located across the country, the first at Scarborough in 1854. Image: Gerrard, 2003, Medieval archaeology: understanding traditions and contemporary approaches

English Heritage recommended 'an initiative to establish a national list of production centres, recording the whereabouts of the finds, references to publication, or the current state of work', a response to the disappointing rate of publication

of excavated production sites and the need to improve identification and common nomenclatures for medieval pottery. A new national database could address these concerns, be a basis for further technical studies of kilns, and make further research more cost-effective, especially for archaeologists working across large areas of the country.

Gathering the data
The project was established at King Alfred's College, Winchester, designed and managed by Chris Gerrard, undertaken by Phil Marter and funded by English Heritage. The procedure was simple. Information held on medieval pottery production sites (defined here as c. 850–1600 AD) in England was obtained from the NMR Long-listings and Excavation Index and from county SMRs (70% of whom responded), plus the Medieval Ceramics Survey and the National Reference Collection of Medieval Ceramics at the British Museum. Major published national and regional data sets and journals, Victoria County Histories and published documentary sources (Lay Subsidy 'potting-related' names, for example) were used. An advance digital

copy of the thin-sections database allowed descriptions from pottery fragments found at production sites to be linked in. About half the county museums targeted responded to a request for accession numbers. These sources, nearly 1500 in all, were cross-checked against the National Medieval Ceramics bibliography to verify a master database of some 4500 entries which was circulated to regional secretaries of the Medieval Pottery Research Group for further checking.

Providing the access
The key to success has been a series of linked tables within a Microsoft Access database, allowing easy interrogation in various ways. These records include archaeological investigations, kilns, components (eg waster dumps), pottery fabrics, forms (standardised using the *Classification of Medieval Pottery Forms*; MPRG 1998) and sources. In all, we have recorded 738 kilns, 97 waster pits, 80 buildings interpreted as potters' workshops or living accommodation, and a wide range of associated features such as clay pits, puddling floors, fuel dumps, fences, drains and boundary ditches.

The bibliography confirms that most recent work has been undertaken by a small pool of active researchers, with a notable lack of academic research in universities, especially at MPhil and PhD levels. Teaching with medieval pottery collections also seems minimal. Few recent theses were identified, the weight of publication strongly favouring short descriptive articles rather than broader scale analysis of results. It is a sign of the times that the basis of modern research into kiln

classification remains Musty (1974) and that, with some notable exceptions (Le Patourel 1968; Moorhouse 1983), documentary evidence for the medieval pottery industry remains untapped.

Functions and additions
The database is by no means complete and individual entries are of variable quality. The process of refining these is ongoing. The main strength of the database is that it can provide a broad picture of pottery production in any given area. A list of linked bibliographical references is also provided. The hope is that organisations will be led to comparative material which they can relate to their own results.

Resources such as this will enhance the growing links between local, regional and national research agenda as well as bridging between organisations such as the Medieval Pottery Research Group, university staff and commercial archaeology units. It should stimulate research and prompt final publication of some key sites. Of course, it should go without saying that the database is not a substitute for experience in handling medieval pottery and the recognition of fabrics and forms, and where more detailed information is required the advice of a pottery specialist should be sought.

Where to find it
The database is now equipped with an 'easy-to-use' front end complete with a selection of regularly used data queries and a help file, and is available on CD. The CDs are free of charge to all who originally supplied information to the project,



Medieval pottery kiln excavated at Potterspury, Northamptonshire. The database lists archaeological work which has revealed evidence for pottery production, including information on what was found, where it was found, and when the work took place. Organisations and individuals undertaking archaeological work are listed along with the location of resulting archives and associated publications. Photograph: authors